

Method for the production of recombinant peptides with a low amount of  
trisulfides.

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The invention relates to a method for the production of recombinant peptides with a low amount of trisulfides which is characterized by the addition of a metal salt during or after the fermentation step and to a method for reduction of the amount of trisulfides in the production of recombinant peptides, characterized by the addition  
10 of a metal salt during or after fermentation. The peptide is preferably human growth hormone and the salt preferably a potassium or sodium phosphate.

Background

In the recombinant production of peptides, especially in the production of pharmaceuticals,  
15 the amount of contamination, such as variants of the wanted protein, should be reduced as much as possible both from economical and therapeutical aspects.

In the recombinant production of peptides, variants with an extra sulfur atom in a disulfide bridge sometimes are found, and the present invention relates to this problem.

Human Growth hormone, hGH, is a protein consisting of a single chain of 191 amino  
20 acids. The molecule is cross-linked by two disulfide bridges and the monomeric form has a molecular weight of 22 kDa.

hGH preparations have been prepared from human pituitaries, but nowadays the products on the market are produced by recombinant methods, rhGH.

Two types of therapeutically useful recombinant hGH preparations are present on the  
25 market: the authentic one, e.g. Genotropin®, Pharmacia & Upjohn AB, and an analogue with an additional methionine residue at the N-terminal end, e.g. Somatonorm®.

hGH is used to stimulate linear growth in patients with hypo pituitary dwarfism or Turner's syndrome but other indications have also been suggested.

A new variant of human growth hormone, hGH, has been found and reference is given to  
30 Pavlu et al, 1993, Bioseparation 3, 257-265. This variant has been identified and characterized, see Andersson et al, 1996, Int. J. Peptide, Protein, Res. 47, 311-321. The

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variant, which is formed during the expression of hGH in *Escherichia coli*, is found to be more hydrophobic than rhGH and has been structurally defined as a trisulfide variant of rhGH.

The variant is only formed during synthesis in *E. coli* and has not been found in hGH preparations from human pituitaries.

- 5 This phenomenon of the trisulfides in peptides, produced by recombinant methods, has also been described for recombinant superoxide dismutase (Briggs et al, 1987, *Biochem., Biophys. Acta*, 537, 100-109) and for a mutein of interleukin, (Breton J et al. *J. Chromatogr. A.*, 1995, 709(1), 135-46).

- 10 In WO 94/24127 a method for converting a hydrophobic derivative of a growth hormone into the native form of growth hormone is disclosed. The hydrophobic derivative of the growth hormone comprises an extra sulfur atom. The method is a chemical treatment of the derivative of growth hormone with a mercapto compound. As examples are cysteine, glutathione, 2-mercapto ethanol and dithiothreitol given.

- 15 In WO 96/02570 a method is disclosed comprising the chemical treatment with a sulfite compound for the conversion of the derivative of growth hormone into the native form. Mercapto compounds and sulfite compounds are used in the redox-reaction for the conversion of the already formed growth hormone comprising an extra sulfur atom.

- 20 The invention

We have now found a new method for the reduction of the amount of trisulfides in the production of recombinant peptides, e.g. both proteins and smaller peptides.

- The invention is based on the novel and unexpected finding that the amount of trisulfides in the production of recombinant peptides can be reduced by the addition  
25 of a metal salt, preferably in excess, already during or after fermentation and not, as earlier suggested, by conversion of the formed trisulfide of growth hormone into the native form.

- This reduced amount of the derivative is due to inhibition of the activity of  $H_2S$  in the medium and the prevention of the formation of the modified growth hormone  
30 comprising an extra sulfur atom

The addition can be done directly after fermentation, e.g. after the fermentation has been terminated and the cells are harvested and before further process steps.

The addition can e.g. be done with a buffer including the salt.

The protein can be any recombinant protein but is preferably recombinant growth hormone which can be both human and animal such as human growth hormone (hGH), bovine growth hormone (bGH) and porcine growth hormone (pGH).

The metal salt can be any metal chosen among alkalimetal and earth metal.

pH is preferably equal to or lower than pH 7. More preferable pH is equal to or lower than 6.8 and most preferable pH is equal to or lower than 6.0.

10 The pH regulation can be achieved with a selected buffer including the metal salt.

The metal is preferably alkali, such as sodium or potassium and the salt is preferably sodium or potassium phosphate or acetate.

The concentration of free sulfide ions is minimized by addition of the metal salt in molar excess.

15 The used metal salt is preferably not a sulfite or a mercapto compound.

The attached claims define the invention.

Figure 1 shows the amount of trisulfide-GH in the extracts.

Figure 2 shows the induction and inhibition of trisulfide formation in GH

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In the examples below a recombinant produced hGH has been produced or used, but the invention as claimed is not limited to this peptide. The trisulfide variant is named trisulfide-GH.

## 25 EXAMPLES

hGH was produced in *E. Coli* according to known methods. Reference can be given to EP 177343, example 8.

The transformant of *E. Coli* was fermented in the medium, the culture was agitated under aeration and glucose was added. The fermentation was terminated by turning off the glucose  
30 and aeration. At this point a reference sample was taken. Thereafter the cells were harvested.

For the production of pure hGH, the harvested cells were concentrated, washed, solubilized by freezing, thawed and purified according to known methods.

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Example 1. pH variation, lab scale.

The culture was harvested and the cells were concentrated by microfiltration. The pH was 7.3 in the cell concentrate. Four batches of the cell concentrate were taken. In three batches  
5 (500 ml) the pH was adjusted to 6.5, 7.0 and 7.8, with HCl or NaOH, respectively. The fourth batch is the non-treated comparison sample. Thereafter the cell concentrates were frozen.

The four batches were thawed and the cell concentrates were diluted twice with a buffer containing 10 mM Tris-HCl and 1 mM Na<sub>2</sub>-EDTA pH 8.2. Cell free extracts were obtained  
10 by centrifugation.

The amount of trisulfide-GH in the extracts was determined.

The result is shown in Figure 1.

It was found that the amount of trisulfide-GH was highest at pH 7.8 (12%). This could be compared to the fourth batch which was not pH-changed.

15 A pH above 7.0 gave too high amount of trisulfide-GH in this experiment, thus pH should be lower.

Example 2. Pilot scale

The culture was harvested and the cells were concentrated by microfiltration. The pH in the  
20 cell concentrate was 7.2. The cell concentrate was divided in two portions (about 30 L). Cell concentrate A was washed with about one volume of water and was thereafter frozen at - 30°C.

Cell concentrate B was washed with about one volume of 0.05 M potassium phosphate buffer, pH 6.6. The pH in cell concentrate B was 6.8. The cell concentrate was thereafter  
25 frozen at -30°C.

After thawing, the concentrated cells were extracted by diafiltration with Tris-HCl /EDTA buffer and the amount of trisulfides was determined. The amount of trisulfide-GH was 6% in extract A and about 3 % in extract B, thus the double in A compared to B. This showed that  
30 low pH and the metal salt buffer reduces the amount of the trisulfide variant of growth hormone.

## Example 3. Pilot scale

The amount of trisulfides in the reference sample, taken before harvest, was determined.

The culture was harvested and the cells were concentrated by microfiltration. The pH in the cell concentrate was 7.2. The cell concentrate was divided in two portions (about 30 L).

- 5 Cell concentrate C was washed with about one volume of water and was thereafter frozen at - 30°C.

Cell concentrate D was washed with about one volume of 0.9 % NaCl in water. The pH in that cell concentrate was 7.2. The cell concentrate was thereafter frozen at -30°C.

- After thawing, the concentrated cells were extracted by diafiltration with Tris-HCl /EDTA  
10 buffer and the amount of trisulfides was determined. The amount of trisulfide-GH was about 5 % in extract C and about 4.8 % in D, thus the same in C and D. The ratio of trisulfide-GH in extract C : reference sample was  $5.0 \% : 2.0 \% = 2.5$  and the ratio of trisulfide-GH in extract D : reference sample was  $4.7 \% : 2.0 \% = 2.4$

- This showed that for a periplasmatic extract not only the addition of a metal salt but also the  
15 low pH is of importance.

## Example 4. Pilot scale

The amount of trisulfides in the reference sample, taken before harvest, was determined.

- The culture was harvested and the cells were concentrated by microfiltration. The pH in the  
20 cell concentrate was 7.2. The cell concentrate (E) was washed with about one volume of 0.025 M sodium phosphate buffer pH 6.0, to which 1 ml/L HCl 37 % was added. The pH in cell concentrate E was 5.9. The cell concentrate was thereafter frozen at -30°C.

After thawing the concentrated cells were extracted by diafiltration with Tris-HCl /EDTA buffer and the amount of trisulfides was determined.

- 25 The ratio of trisulfide-GH in extract E : reference sample was  $1.6 \% : 1.4 \% = 1.1$ .

This showed that the amount of trisulfide-GH can be reduced by the addition of a metal salt and a low pH.

### Example 5. Pilot scale

The amount of trisulfides in the reference sample, taken before harvest, was determined.

The culture was harvested and the cells were concentrated by microfiltration. The pH in the  
5 cell concentrate was 7.2. The cell concentrate was divided in two portions (about 30 L).

Cell concentrate F was washed with about one volume of acetate buffer, containing sodium acetate x 3H<sub>2</sub>O, 8.03 g/L and acetic acid (100 %) 2.35 ml/L. The pH in cell concentrate F was 5.9. The cell concentrate was thereafter frozen at - 30°C.

Cell concentrate G was washed with about one volume of 0.025 M sodium phosphate buffer  
10 pH 6.0, to which 0.5 ml/L concentrated H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> was added. The pH in cell concentrate G was 5.9. The cell concentrate was thereafter frozen at -30°C.

After thawing the concentrated cells were extracted by diafiltration with Tris-HCl /EDTA buffer and the amount of trisulfides was determined.

The ratio of trisulfide-GH in extract F : reference sample was 3.4 % : 3.1 % = 1.1 and the  
15 ratio of trisulfide-GH in extract G : reference sample was 2.6 % : 3.1 % = 0.8.

This showed that the amount of trisulfide-GH can be reduced by the addition of a metal salt and a low pH.

### Example 6. Comparison of buffers and pH.

20 250µl of pure hGH (from the production of Genotropin®) in water (2.436 mg/ml) + 250µl of different 100 mM buffers , see Table 1, were mixed. Saturated H<sub>2</sub>S (0.11 M) in distilled water was used immediately after preparation. 50µl of distilled water (control) or H<sub>2</sub>S in three different dilutions was added to each sample. (0.5, 0.1 and 0.02 mM H<sub>2</sub>S, respectively)

25 The concentration was thereafter 1.11 mg hGH/ml.

These solutions were incubated with the different concentrations of H<sub>2</sub>S during 3 hours at room temperature for the preparation of the trisulfide variant of hGH.

After incubation, freezing, thawing and desalting of all samples in 25 mM Tris-HCl at pH 7.6, the amount of trisulfide was analyzed.

The buffers were prepared according to standard tables.

Table 1

Na-phosphate, pH 7.8

5 Na-phosphate, pH 7.0

Na-phosphate, pH 6.5

Na-phosphate, pH 6.0

Na-citrate, pH 6.2

Tris-HCl, pH 7.6

10 Ammonium citrate, pH 6.2

The result is shown in Figure 2.

Ammonium citrate gave no reduction of trisulfides despite the low pH.

Na-phosphate at pH 6.0 gave the best result but also Na-phosphate at higher pH can  
15 be used.

This showed that for pure hGH the addition of a metal salt is of importance for the amount of trisulfides.

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